Dr.Ambedkar's Writings On Chh.Shivaji Maharaj



Source:
Who Were the Shudras

and property is grasped, all difficulty in accepting the thesis that the degradation of the Shudra was entirely due to loss of Upanayana must vanish.

It will be seen, from what has been said above, how the sacrament of Upanayana was in the ancient Aryan society fundamental and how the social status and personal rights of persons depended upon it. Without Upanayana, a person was doomed to social degradation, to ignorance and to poverty. The stoppage of Upanayana was a most deadly weapon—discovered by the Brahmins to avenge themselves against the Shudras. It had the effect of an atomic bomb. It did make the Shudra, to use the language of the Brahmins, a graveyard.

VII

That the Brahmins possessed the power to deny Upanayana is beyond question. The doubt probably arises from the fact that there is nowhere an express statement showing the conferment of such a power upon the Brahmins. All the same, whatever doubt there may be lurking in the minds of persons who are not aware of the operative parts of the religious system of the Indo-Aryans must vanish if account is taken of two things: (1) the exclusive right of the Brahmin to officiate at the Upanayana and (2) the penalties imposed upon the Brahmin for performing unauthorised Upanayana.

It is probable that in most ancient times it was the father who taught his son the *Gayatri*, with which the study of the Veda begins and for which the ceremony of Upanayana was devised at a later stage. But it is beyond question that from a very early time the function of performing Upanayana had been assigned to a guru or a teacher called the Acharya and the boy went and stayed in the Acharya's house.

The questions as to who should be the Acharya and what should be his qualifications have been the subject of discussions from very ancient times.

The Acharya must be a man learned in the Vedas. A Brahmana text[1] says "he, whom a teacher devoid of learning initiates, enters from darkness into darkness and he also (i.e. an acharya) who is himself unlearned (enters into darkness)."

The Ap. Dh. S. (I . 1 . 1 . 12—13), lays down that an Acharya selected for performing one's Upanayana should be endowed with learning and should be one whose family is hereditarily learned and who is serene in mind, and that one should study Vedic lore under him up to the end (of brahmacharya) as long as the teacher does not fall off from the path of Dharma.[2]

But the first and foremost qualification of an Acharya is that he must be a Brahmana : It was only in times of difficulty (i.e., when a Brahmana is not available) that a person was allowed to have a Kshatriya or a Vaishya teacher.[3] This exception was permitted only during the period when the distinction between the right to learn the Vedas and the right to teach the Vedas had not been made. But when that distinction came to be made—and it was made in very early times—in fact, the conflict between Vasishtha and Vishvamitra was just on this very point—the Brahmin alone came to possess the right to be an Acharya fit to officiate at an Upanayana.

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[1] Quoted in the Ap. Dh. S.,I. i . i . 11, Kane, II (I), p. 324.

[2] According to Vyasa (quoted in Sam. p.,p. 408) the Acharya should be one who is solely devoted to the Veda, who knows Dharma, is born of a good family, who is pure, is a *shrotriya* that has studied his Vedic sakha and who is not lazy. Shrotriya has been defined as one who has studied one *sakha* of a Veda.

[3] It is curious to note that in such cases the only service a Brahmana student was required to render to his Kshatriya or Vaishya guru was to follow after him ; he had not to render bodily service (such as shampooing or washing the feet, etc.). *Vide* Ap. Dh. S., II, 2 . 4, 25-28 Gaut. 7, 1-3, Baud. Dh. S.,I. 2 . 40-42, Manu, II . 241. It was also premised that a Kshatriya or a Vaishya should teach a Brahmana only when urged by him and not at his sweet will.

One thing therefore must be taken as well-established, namely, that none but a Brahmin could perform the Upanayana ceremony. Upanayana performed by anybody else is not a valid Upanayana.

The other operative part of the Indo-Aryan religious system is the obligation imposed upon the Brahmin not to do any unauthorized act of a religious character. A Brahmin guilty of any such conduct was liable to punishment or penance. Many such penalties are to be found in the ancient Law Books. I refer to Manu and Parashara.

Manu (III . 150ff.), lays down what class of Brahmins are to be deemed unworthy (to partake) of oblations to the gods and manes. In this list he includes :

> III, 156.—" He who teaches for a stipulated fee and he who is taught on that condition, he who instructs Shudra pupils and he whose teacher is a Shudra, he who speaks rudely, the son of an adulteress, and the son of a widow."

Parashara says :[1]

> " That Brahmana, who for the sake of dakshina (gift of money or fee) offers oblation into fire on behalf of a Shudra, would become a Shudra, while the Shudra (for whom he offers) would become a Brahmana;" that, according to Madhava, propounds that the merit of the rite " goes to the Shudra and the Brahmana incurs sin."

Those who may ask what powers the Brahmins had to deprive the Shudra of his right to Upanayana may consider the combined effect of these two facts : (1) the Brahmin's exclusive right to officiate at an Upanayana, and (2) the penalties to which he is made liable for performing an unauthorized Upanayana. If they do, they will have no doubt that the combined effect of these two factors was to vest in the Brahmin the power of performing as well as of denying Upanayana. It is true that such a power has not been expressly vested in the Brahmin. That was because it was unnecessary to do by express

[1] Quoted by Vyavahara Mayukha (edited by Kane, p. 115).

terms what was in fact done by indirect but more effectual means.

That the Brahmins are conscious of the possession of this power to deny Upanayana is also beyond doubt. So far as the records go, there are 16 reported cases in which they have threatened various communities by putting it into operation against them. In nine cases, they challenged the Kayasthas, in four they challenged the Panchalas, in one they challenged the Palshes. What is important is that they challenged even two Maratha Kings. These instances have occurred between 556 to 1904 A.D. It is true that they do not belong to ancient times. It must however be remembered that these instances are mere evidences of the exercise by the Brahmins of their power to deny Upanayana. The power itself must have been acquired in much more ancient times. That they have acquired it earlier is not an empty assertion without support. Satyakama Jabali's instance which is very ancient is cited generally to prove that the Varna of a man was determined by his *guna* (mental and moral qualities) and not by his birth. While this is true, it is equally true that Jabali's case proves that even in ancient times the Brahmins had acquired the right to refuse to perform Upanayana.

The enumeration of these cases has very little value for the purpose in hand unless we know the deductions that could be drawn from the decisions arrived at in them. To be able to do this, we must know the details of each case. Unfortunately, in most of them beyond the decision other details are not sufficiently full for the purpose. There is only one case that of the Brahmins *versus* Shivaji in respect of which the details are full and well-known. The case is sufficiently important and it is therefore well worth detailed examination. The deductions deducible from it are not only interesting and instructive but they throw a flood of light on the point under discussion.

VIII

As is well known, Shivaji after having established a Hindu independent kingdom in the western part of Maharashtra thought of proclaiming himself a king by having his coronation performed. It was felt by Shivaji and his friends that the coronation ceremony if it was at all to be of any value must be performed according to Vedic rites. But in carrying out his wishes Shivaji found himself faced with many difficulties. He found that whether his coronation could be performed with Vedic rites depended entirely upon the Brahmins. Nobody was from religious point of view qualified to perform the ceremony except a Brahmin. Secondly, he found that no such ceremony could be performed unless it was proved that he was a Kshatriya. There was a third difficulty, namely, that even if he was found to be a Kshatriya, he was past the age of Upanayana and without Upanayana there could be no coronation. The third difficulty was a minor one for it could be got over by the performance of the Vratya Stoma ceremony. The first difficulty was the greatest stumbling block. It related to Shivaji's status. The question was, was he a Kshatriya? If that could be got over, the rest was easy. Shivaji's claim that he was a Kshatriya was opposed by many. His principal opponents were Brahmins who were led by his own Prime Minister Moro Pant Pingle. Unfortunately for Shivaji even his Maratha Sardars had refused to give him social precedence[1]

[1] Kinkaid has some interesting observations to make as to how the idea of coronation originated. He says :—

"For although the high-spirited Deccan nobles gladly followed Shivaji in the field, they were unwilling in private life to concede to him any precedence. And at State dinners they resented that a Bhosle should sit on a seat raised above those assigned to Mohites, and Nimbalkars, Savants and Ghorpades. He spoke of the matter to his Secretary, Balaji Avji Chitnis and the latter urged him to take the royal crown from the hands, not of the Moghul Emperor, but of a Benares priest. The king consulted his mother, Jijabhai, the saintly Ramdas and his favourite

and had ranged themselves against him. In their view, he was a Shudra. Shivaji's claim was also in direct conflict with the well-established thesis long insisted upon by the Brahmins that there were no Kshatriyas in the Kali age. Shivaji was living in the Kali age. Obviously he could not be a Kshatriya. This objection to his claim for the status of a Kshatriya was further strengthened by the non-performance of the ceremony of Upanayana or the investiture of the sacred thread at the proper time, which was fixed by the Sastras to be the eleventh year in the case of the Kshatriyas. This was taken to be evidence of his being a Shudra. He was however fortunate in securing the services of one Gagabhat, a renowned Brahmin, resident of Benares, learned both in the Vedas and Sastras. Gagabhat solved all difficulties and performed Shivaji's coronation[1] on 6th June 1674 at Raigad first after performing the Vratya Stoma and then the Upanayana.

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goddess Bhavani and found them all favourable to his Secretary's suggestions." —*History of Maharashtra*, p. 244.

From this it appears that the idea behind Vedic coronation was to obtain social precedence and not so much to obtain legal and political sovereignty.

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[1] It seems that some Brahmins were prepared to perform Shivaji's coronation but with non-Vedic, i.e., with Pauranic rites as is done in the case of the Shudras. They predicted all sorts of evils to happen if Shivaji had his coronation performed with Vedic rites. Unfortunately these evils did take place and Shivaji who undoubtedly was superstitious had another coronation performed according to non-Vedic rites. The following account of this second coronation taken from Mr. C. V. Vaidya makes interesting reading :

" Obstructive and dissatisfied Brahmins there were even then as always. They did not deem the ceremony satisfactory, though it was acclaimed by the whole of Maharashtra. A poem named Rajyabhisheka Kalpataru, a copy of which is in the Library of the Bengal Royal Asiatic Society and which has been published from it by Itihasa S. Mandal of Poona (Quarterly, Vol. X-1), embodies some objections raised against the coronation ceremony gone through. This poem is not quite contemporary, as it mentions the later idea that Shivaji was an incarnation of Siva (not of Vishnu as represented by the earlier Shivabharata) though it is of the time of Rajaram. It gives an imaginary conversation between Nis'chalapuri, a learned Brahmin ascetic of Benares who was an opponent of Gagabhat, and Govindbhat Barve as taking place in Konkan. It recounts the ill omens which preceded and followed the coronation, such as the death of Prataprao Gujar, the death of Kashibai, wife of Shivaji, etc., and the wound caused to Gagabhat himself on the nose by the falling of a rafter. The poem expressly says that Gagabhat

Shivaji's case is important for several reasons. It is important because it proves that nobody except a Brahmin has the right to perform the Upanayana and that nobody can compel a Brahmin to perform it if he is not prepared to do so. Shivaji was the ruler of an independent kingdom and had already started styling himself Maharaja and Chhatrapati. There were many Brahmins who were his subjects. Yet, Shivaji could not compel anyone of them to perform his coronation.

It is important because it proves that the ceremony to be valid must be performed by a Brahmin. A ceremony performed by a non-Brahmin would be infructuous. It was open to Shivaji to have his coronation performed by a non-Brahmin. But he did not dare[1] to do it. For he knew it would be without any social or spiritual efficacy.

In the third place, it is important because it proves that the power of determining the status of a Hindu depends entirely upon the will of the Brahmins. The decision in favour of Shivaji is sought to be justified by the geneology which was brought from Mewar by Shivaji's friend, Balaji Avaji, and which connected Shivaji with

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engaged for the ceremony those Brahmins only who were his followers and refused to employ those recommended by Nis'chalapuri. Many defects in the ceremony itself, are next mentioned. Thus when Shivaji was getting into the chariot after the ceremony of ascending the throne Gagabhat himself first sat in the chariot and then Shivaji. After seeing the whole ceremony through, Nis'chalapuri left the fort but told Shivaji that bad events would happen on the 13th, 22nd, and 55th days. On the 13th day accordingly, Shivaji's mother died. Next a horse-shed was burnt at Pratapgad with good many horses in it and an elephant died on Sinhgad. These incidents induced Shivaji to call Nis'chalapuri back and through him and his Brahmins Shivaji performed afresh the ceremony of ascending the throne, not with Vedic rites, but Tantrik or magical. This ceremony is also described in detail. There are mentioned some Vedic mantras from Sama Veda as recited; but the ceremony was not Vedic. It was performed on Ashvin Suddha 5 (Lalita Panchami day S. 1596), as is stated at the end of the poem. This ceremony is also mentioned by J and Nis'chalapuri is also spoken of in a Mahomedan record."
—*Shivaji the Founder of Maratha Swaraj*, pp. 252-253.

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[1] The Kayasthas had at one time resolved to perform their own ceremonies as a protest against the constant challenge by the Brahmins to their status. But they did not put their resolve into action. The reason must be the same.

the Sisodyas of Mewar who were reckoned as Kshatriyas. It has been alleged that the geneology was a fabrication got up for the occasion. Assuming it was not a fabrication,[1] how can it justify the recognition of Shivaji's claim to be a Kshatriya ? Far from establishing that Shivaji was a Kshatriya, the geneology could do no more than raise another question, namely, whether the Sisodiyas were Kshatriyas. The Sisodiyas were Rajputs. There is considerable doubt as to whether the Rajputs are the descendants of the original Kshatriyas who formed the second Varna of the ancient Indo-Aryan community. One view is that they are foreigners, remnants of the Huns who invaded India and established themselves in Rajputana and whom the Brahmins raised to the status of Kshatriyas with the object of using them as means to suppress Buddhism in Central India by a special ceremony before the sacred fire and who were therefore known as the Agnikul Kshatriyas. This view has the support of many erudite scholars who are entitled to speak on the subject. Vincent Smith says :[2]

> "In this place I want to draw attention to the fact, long suspected and now established by good evidence that the foreign immigrants into Rajputana and the upper Gangetic valley were not utterly destroyed in the course of their wars with the native princes. Many of course perished but many survived and were mixed in the general population of which no inconsiderable part is formed by their descendants. These foreigners like their fore-runners the Sakas and the Yue-chi universally yielded to the wonderful assimilative power of Hinduism and rapidly became Hinduised. Clans or families which succeeded in winning chieftainships were admitted readily into the frame of Hindu polity as Kshatriyas

[1] The Sisodiya family of Mewar was important for two reasons : (1) They were a branch of the Sisodiyas of Udaipur who were descendants of the family of Lava the eldest son of Rama, the hero of Ramayana, (2) The Sisodiyas of Mewar were pure because they had refused to give their females in marriage to the Moghul emperors and had refused to intermarry with other Rajput families such as Jaipur and Jodhpur who had done so. Was it because of these reasons that this attempt to establish that Shivaji was the descendant of the Sisodiyas of Mewar was made ?

[2] Quoted by C. V. Vaidya in his History of Mediæval India, Vol. II, p. 8.

or Rajputs and there is no doubt that the Parjhars and many other famous Rajput clans of the north were developed out of the barbarian hordes which poured into India during the fifth and sixth centuries. The rank and file of the strangers became Gujars and the castes ranking lower than Rajputs in their precedence. Further to the south, various indigenous or aboriginal tribes and clans underwent the same process of Hinduised social promotion in virtue of which Gonds, Bhars, Kharwas and so forth emerged as Chandels, Rathors, Gaharwars and other well-known Rajput clans duly equipped with pedigree reaching back to the sun and the moon."

William Crooke[1] says :

" Recent research has thrown much light on the origin of Rajputs. A wide gulf lies between the Vedic Kshatriyas and the Rajputs of mediæval times which it is now impossible to bridge. It is now certain that the origin of many clans dates from the Saka or Kushan invasions or more certainly from that of the White Huns who destroyed the Gupta empire about 480 A.D. The Gurjar tribe connected with the latter people adopted Hinduism and their leaders formed the main stock from which the higher Rajput families sprang. When these new claimants to princely honour accepted the faith and the institution of Brahmanism the attempt would naturally be made to connect them with the heroes of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Hence arose the body of legend recorded in these annals by which a fabulous origin from the sun and the moon was ascribed to these Rajput families. . . . The group denoted by the name Kshatriya or Rajput depended on status rather than on descent and it was therefore possible for foreigners to be introduced into these tribes without any violation of the prejudices of caste, which was then only partially developed. But it was necessary to disguise this admission of foreigners under a convenient fiction. Hence arose the legend how by a solemn act of purification or initiation under the superintendence of the ancient Vedic Rishis, the *fire-born* septs were created to help the Brahmins in repressing Buddhism and other heresies. This privilege was confined to four septs known as Agnikula or fire-born—viz., the Paramar, Parihar, Chalukya and Chanhan."

[1] Quoted by Vaidya, *ibid*, p. 9.

Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar[1] also holds the same view. According to him, the Rajputs are the descendants of Gujars, the Gujars were foreigners and that the Rajputs are therefore the descendants of foreigners.

The Brahmins engaged for the coronation could not have been ignorant of the origin of the Rajputs, and their claim to be descended from the Kshatriyas. But assuming that they did not know this fact they knew that there was already a previous decision of the Brahmins, namely, that there were no Kshatriyas in the Kali age. This was an old, long-standing decision. And if the Brahmins had respect for precedent, they were bound to throw out the claim of Sisodiyas as well as of Shivaji. Nobody would have blamed them if they had done so. But the Brahmins had never accepted the law of precedent as binding upon them. With them there was no such thing as *stare decisis*.

Fourthly, it is important because it shows that the decisions of the Brahmins on matters of status were open to sale like the indulgences of the Catholic clergy. That the decision of Gagabhat was not an honest decision is obvious from the amount of money which Gagabhat and other Brahmins received as officiating priests. The amount of money spent on the coronation by Shivaji and how much of it went to Gagabhat and the Brahmins will be seen from the following details collected by Mr. Vaidya :[2]

> " These ministers were presented each with one lakh of hon, one elephant, one horse, garments and ornaments. Gagabhat was given one lakh of rupees for seeing the whole ceremony through. The Dakshinas granted by Shivaji on the several occasions of the coronation ceremony were very large, as was suited to the occasion. Sabhasad reports that the whole expenditure amounted to one crore and forty-two lakhs of hons or 426 lakhs of rupees.

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[1] Quoted by Mr. Vaidya, *ibid*, p. 10. Mr. Vaidya combats the view and tries to prove that the Rajputs are not foreigners but are the descendants of original Aryan-Kshatriyas. What Mr. Vaidya says does not appear to be very convincing.

[2] *Shivaji, the Founder of Maratha Swaraj*, pp. 248 and 252.

Sabhasad relates that 50,000 Vaidika Brahmins had collected on the occasion of Shivaji's coronation.[1] Besides these there were Jogis, Sanyasis, etc., by thousands. These were fed or given corn below the fort. It is related in contemporary papers that Shivaji, before coronation, was weighed against gold and almost every other metal as well as auspicious thing. Dutch record describing the ceremony in detail on 3rd October PS. 1684 states that Shivaji weighed 17,000 hons or 160 lbs. and he was also weighed against silver, copper, iron, etc., and against camphor, salt, sugar, butter, various kinds of fruit, betel-nuts, etc., and the value of the whole was distributed amongst Brahmins. On the 7th June, the day after the coronation, Dakshina was given in general and every Brahmin got three to five rupees and everyone else, whether woman or child two rupees and one rupee. In all, the Dakshina amounted to one and a half lakhs of hon[2] in value.

" Oxenden also states in his diary from 13th May to 13th June that Shivaji was weighed against gold and the weight 16,000 hons, together with one lakh of hons in addition were distributed as Dakshinas among Brahmins.

" The above noted Dutch record further states that for the Vratya ceremony 7,000 hons were given to Gagabhat and 17,000 to other Brahmins. On the 5th of June Shivaji bathed in holy Ganges water and every Brahmin present was given 100 hons."

Can the amount paid to Gagabhat be taken as representing nothing more than a fee[3] properly payable to a priest ? There is one circumstance which may be depended upon to show that Gagabhat was not even paid enough. It is that what Gagabhat got was comparatively much less than what the Ministers of Shivaji got. Two facts must however be noted as telling on the other side before any conclusion is drawn from this fact. They completely nullify the argument. The first is that the

[1] Mr. Vaidya says this must be a mistake for 5,000. He gives no reason in support of his ' must.'

[2] A *Hon* was equal to 3 rupees.

[3] It must not be supposed that Gagabhat got only Rs. 1 lakh. He got in addition 7,000 *hons* or 21,000 rupees for Vratya Stoma. Further he must have received some part of the gold and the value of other things against which Shivaji was weighed and which was distributed among the Brahmins.

ministers themselves had made large presents[1] to Shivaji on his coronation. Moropant Pingle the Peshwa or Prime Minister of Shivaji, the Mujamdar had paid 7,000 hons and the other two ministers 5,000 hons each. Deducting these, the presents given to them by Shivaji must be said to be much smaller than they appear to be.

The second fact is that these ministers of Shivaji were the greatest opponents of Shivaji in this project of coronation. They were staunch in their view that he was a Shudra and that he was not entitled to have his coronation performed as it was a right which belonged to the Kshatriya only. It is therefore no surprise if Shivaji gave them large presents with a view to silence them and win them over permanently to his side. The amount of money paid to the ministers by Shivaji is therefore no criterion to determine whether the amount paid to Gagabhat was no more than a fair fee for officiation. Indeed there are so many twists and turns taken by Gagabhat that one is forced to the conclusion that it was more than fair fee and that it included some part as illegal gratification to keep him straight.

In this business of coronation the man who took the most leading part in bringing it about was a Kayastha from Maharashtra by name Balaji Avaji who was the Personal Secretary to Shivaji. The first step Balaji took was to send three Brahmins[2] as messengers from Shivaji to fetch Gagabhat from Benares with full information as to the status and purpose of Shivaji. What did Gagabhat do ? He sent back the three messengers with a letter refusing to accept the invitation on the ground that in his view Shivaji was a Shudra and was therefore not fit for coronation. The next step Balaji took was to collect evidence in support of Shivaji's claim to the status of a Kshatriya. He succeeded in obtaining a genealogy which

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[1] Vaidya, *ibid*, p. 247.

[2] They were (1) Keshav Bhat, (2) Bhalachandra Bhat, and (3) Somanath Bhat.

showed that Shivaji was a Kshatriya descended from the Sisodyas who were Rajputs and rulers of Mewad. This evidence he sent with another Messenger[1], to Gagabhat. Gagabhat seemed to have been impressed by the evidence for he agreed to come to Raigad to perform the coronation ceremony. What did Gagabhat do on his arrival ? He said that he had re-examined the evidence and had come to the conclusion that Shivaji was a Shudra and was therefore unfit for coronation.

This is not the only somersault which Gagabhat took in this business. He took another and a very queer turn and declared that he was prepared to perform the coronation of Balaji Avaji for he was a Kayastha and therefore a Kshatriya but not of Shivaji who was a Shudra. Gagabhat did not stop there. He again turned round and gave his opinion that Shivaji was a Kshatriya and that he was prepared to perform his coronation and even went so far as to write a treatise known as Gagabhatti in which he sought to prove that the Kayasthas were bastards.

What do these twists and turns show ? Do they not show he was a most unwilling priest and that his willingness has had to be bought by cash ? If this argument is sound then there is no doubt that his decision that Shivaji was a Kshatriya was sold by him for illegal gratification[2].

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[1] The name of the messenger was Nilo Yesaji. He was a Kayastha. The three Brahmins who went on the first occasion to fetch Gagabhat were suspected to have committed a foul play by acting contrary to their instructions and betraying the interests of Shivaji to which as Brahmins they were opposed. It is possible that Balaji felt that the letter brought by them was a piece of manœuvre. That is why Balaji this time sent a Kayastha, a man of his own caste.

[2] For facts about Gagabhat's twists and turns stated above, I have drawn on Mr. K. S. Thakare's Marathi booklet '*Gnamanyacha Itihas*. Mr. Thakare has in his turn drawn upon the Bakhars or Chronicles. How far they are reliable it is difficult to say. It must however be admitted that the twists and turns of Gagabhat appear to be true because without them it would be difficult to explain certain relevant and disturbing facts. For instance, take the following question. Did Gagabhat change after coming to Raigad and if so, why ? The change and the reason for it is to be found in the discovery by Gagabhat that another Brahmin by

Lastly Shivaji's case is important because it shows that the Brahmins in the matter of status did not recognize as being bound by the principle of *res judicata*. They regard themselves as free to reopen a case already decided by them. For how long did the Brahmins respect their decision that Shivaji was a Kshatriya ?

Shivaji started a new era from the day of his coronation, namely, 6th June 1674 which he called the Rajyabhisheka Era. How long did it remain in vogue ? Only so long as Shivaji and his descendants remained as active rulers on the throne. The moment effective sovereignty passed into the hands of the Brahmin Peshwas, they issued an order[1] to discontinue it. Not only did they stop the use of the Era, they began using the style of the Muslim Emperors, namely, the Fasli year. The Brahmins did not stop there. They went further and began to question the very status of Shivaji's descendants as Kshatriyas[2]. They could do nothing to the two sons of Shivaji, Sambhaji and Rajaram. Shivaji had their Upanayana performed in his life-time by Brahmins with Vedic rites. They could do nothing to his grandson, Shahu because the Brahmins had no ruling power in their hands. The moment Shahu transferred his sovereign powers to his Brahmin Peshwa their road to repudiation became clear. There is no evidence whether Ramjee Raje the successor and adopted son of Shahu, who was a minor and whose guardians were the Peshwas, had his Upanayana performed and if so, whether it was performed with Vedic rites. But there is definite evidence that the Upanayana

name Moropant Pingle who was no less than the Prime Minister of Shivaji was deadly opposed to Shivaji's claim to be a Kshatriya. It is likely that the two Brahmins on meeting together saw eye to eye which made Gagabhat change. Why did Moropant who was a strong opponent became later on a strong supporter of Shivaji's coronation ? If it is a fact that Gagabhat did propose that Balaji should be proclaimed king it gives a complete explanation of Moropant's change of front. Balaji being Kayastha and the Kayasthas being the deadliest enemies of the Brahmins, Moropant consented to Shivaji's coronation as a lesser of the two evils.

[1] Sardesai—Marathi Riyasat, II, p. 363, and Vaidya's Shivaji, p. 251.

[2] What follows is taken from *Siddhanta Vijaya*, edited by Rao Bahadur Dongre.

ceremony of his successors, Shahu II, who was adopted in 1777 had been performed with *Pauranic* rites and by the direction of the Peshwa[1]. The performance of Upanayana of Shahu II with *Pauranic* rites was tantamount to his being regarded by the Peshwas as a Shudra. For it is only in the case of a Shudra that the ceremonies are performed with Pauranic rites. What happened to Maharaja Pratapsingh who succeeded Shahu II in 1808 whether or not his Upanayana was performed and if performed whether it was performed with Vedic rites or *Pauranic* rites it is not possible to be definite. One thing, however, is definitely known that in about 1827 the Shankaracharya of Karvir in his judgment about the status of the Kayasthas of Sangli stated[2] *"that there were no Kshatriyas in the Kali age and that documents showing that neither Shivaji, nor Sambhaji, nor Shahu were Kshatriyas exist in his Daftar."* It is alleged that this statement is not to be found in the original judgment but was interpolated by the Brahmin Raja of Sangli. Be that as it may be, it was a direct challenge to the status of Pratapsinha as a descent of Shivaji. Pratapsinha had to put the issue to a conference of Brahmins which was held in Satara in 1830. The majority gave a decision in favour and saved Pratapsinha from being degraded to the status of a Shudra.

Foiled in their attempt to level down one line of Shivaji to the status of a Shudra, the Brahmins began their attack on the status of the second line of Shivaji which had established itself at Kolhapur. In the reign of one of the rulers of Kolhapur by name Babasaheb Maharaj, the Palace Priest by name Raghunath Sastri Parvate took into his head to perform all ceremonies in the Palace with *Pauranic* rites. It is said that he was stopped from continuing the practice. Babasaheb died in 1886. From 1886 to 1894, all rulers were minors and the administration

[1] Dongre, Introduction, p. 6.

[2] Dongre, Introduction, p. 9.

was in the hands of the British. There is no direct evidence as to the exact manner and mode of ceremonial performances adopted by the Palace priest. In 1902, the late Shahu Maharaj issued orders to the Palace Priest to perform all ceremonies in the *Vedic* manner. The priest refused and insisted on performing it in the *Pauranic* manner suggesting thereby that the rulers of Kolhapur were Shudras and not Kshatriyas. The part played by Sankaracharya of Karvir Math in this affair is very noteworthy. At the time of the controversy the head of the Math called Guru, had adopted a disciple (Sishya) by name Brahmanalkar and had given him all the rights of the head of the Math. At first both the Guru and the Sishya were on the side of the Palace Priest and against the Maharaja. Later on, the disciple took the side of the Maharaja and accepted his status as a Kshatriya. The Guru who remained on the side of the Priest excommunicated the Sishya. The Maharaja later on tried to create his own Sankaracharya[1] but he too proved false to the Maharaja.

Shivaji was recognised as a Kshatriya. Obviously, that status was not a personal honour conferred on him. It was a status in tail and belonged to his family as well as to his descendants. Nobody could question it. It could be lost by a particular descendant by doing some act which was inconsistent with it. If could not be lost generally. No act inconsistent with the Kshatriya status was attributed to any of the descendants of Shivaji. Yet the Brahmins came forward to repudiate the decision on their status.

This could happen only because the Brahmins claimed the power to do and undo the status of any Hindu at any time. They can raise a Shudra to the status of a Kshatriya. They can degrade the Kshatriya to the status of a Shudra. Shivaji's case proves that their sovereignty in this matter is without limit and without challenge.

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[1] He is known as Dr. Kur[illegible]

These instances[1] are no doubt drawn from the Bombay Presidency only. But the principles from them are clear and general in their application. They are :

(1) That the Brahmins have the exclusive right to perform the Upanayana. Neither Shivaji, nor Pratap Sinha nor the Kayasthas, Panchalas or Palashes wanted the Upanayana to be performed by a non-Brahmin. It is only once that the Kayasthas resolved to have their ceremonies performed by Kayasthas. But it was only a paper resolution.

(2) The Brahmin has the right to say whose Upanayana he will perform and whose he will not perform. In other words, the Brahmin is the sole judge of deciding whether a given community is entitled to Upanayana.

(3) The support of the Brahmins for the performance of Upanayana need not be based on honest grounds. It could be purchased by money. Shivaji got the support of the Brahmin Gagabhat on payment of money.

(4) The denial of Upanayana by the Brahmins need not be on legal or religious ground. It is possible for the denial to be based on purely political grounds. The refusal by the Brahmins of Upanayana to Kayasthas was entirely due to political rivalry between the two.

(5) The right of appeal against the denial of an Upanayana by a Brahmin is only to a Vidvat-Parishad and the Vidvat-Parishad is an assembly for which a Brahmin alone is eligible to be a member.

From the foregoing discussion, it must be clear to all that the Brahmins did possess the power to deny Upanayana. Given the power and the motive, there is nothing strange if they used it against the Shudras.

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[1] For details of each see a Marathi publication—Gramanyacha Itihas, by K. S. Thakare, published in 1919.